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Chateau-Chierry

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CHATEAU-THIERRY

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An American Shrine

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By

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Distributor for Europe :

Souvenir Shop, 11, Rue de Castiglione, Paris

Distributor for America :

Geo. Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wisconsin

6183

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The original drawings for this brochure were made by the distinguished French artist, Monsieur Pierre Desbois, Laureate Member of La Société des Artistes Français, whose etchings and other works have been exhibited for the last nineteen years in the Salon des Artistes Français, and a number of which have received honorable mention from the Jury.

J. A. Moss 1920
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THE SHRINE

Witnessing, as it did, the first great battle participation of American Forces in the World War,—being, indeed, the battleground where the Spirit of America, crusading for Right and Justice, was translated into action against Prussian Militarism, contending for Might and Ruthlessness,—CHATEAU-THIERRY is, and will forever remain, an American Shrine.

When the Kaiser's legions, in their drive for Paris, were stopped upon this battlefield, the conflict itself was more than a physical struggle,—it was a clash of one Civilization against another, a Titanic combat between two opposite moral forces, in which the Ideals of America and France triumphed over the "Kultur" of Germany.

It seems to have been a fitting decree of Fate that this moral combat, with its terrific physical conflict, should have taken place at Château-Thierry, which from time immemorial has been the battleground of militant and religious forces. Captured and burnt by the British in 1421 and occupied by Charles V in 1544, Château-Thierry played an important role during the religious wars. It was sacked by the Spaniards and it was under its walls that Henri de Guise received the wound which gave him the surname, "Balafre" *. In 1814 the town was invaded by the Allies and it was here that Napoleon defeated Blücher in the Battle of Château-Thierry, February 12th, 1814. **

For the second time in the Great War the Germans swept through France to Château-Thierry and once again were knocking at the gates of Paris. It was at this crucial moment, on the last day of May, 1918, that the Second and Third American Divisions were rushed to the battlefield and hurled into the conflict. With a spirit as yet untouched by war, with the Faith of Crusaders in their hearts, with the determination and energy of young America in their souls, they assailed the enemy and nailed his legions to the field in deadly combat. In this, their first real acid test in the crucible of war, battling side by side

* "Balafre" is a French word meaning "scar", or "gash".

** Château-Thierry derived its name from a chateau built upon the heights above the town in 720 by Charles Martel as a residence for the King, Thierry II.

with the "Poilus" of France, the youths from across the Sea displayed fighting qualities of courage and invincibility which were a revelation to France and to the World, as they threw themselves against the Hordes of the Hun, stopped their advance, and, like a barrier across their path, barred their way to Paris.

With the realization by the German High Command that victory was impossible against this new and invincible force, Château-Thierry marked the moral turning point in the World War, which shortly afterwards witnessed defeats that continued without cessation until the Allies were victorious.

While War has passed from the stage and the captains and their men have departed, and trenches and shell holes have been filled, and the battlefield has been covered by a mantle of grass and flowers, evidences of conflict remain in demolished villages, towns and hamlets, over which the spirits of those who fought and died in their defense still hover. So, let Americans who visit Château-Thierry make the pilgrimage to this American shrine in reverence and memory of the deeds and sacrifices of their countrymen.



ON THE WAY TO CHATEAU-THIERRY

LEAVING PARIS

From La Place de l'Opéra proceed via Rue Halévy, named after the great French composer of light opera, to Rue Lafayette, a name loved and revered by every American ; turning to the right, continue ahead to the gates of Paris through Rue Jean Jaurès, — formerly called, " Rue Allemande " (German Street), but renamed after hostilities began, in honor of the great French Socialist leader, who was assassinated at the beginning of the war.



On the Way to Château-Thierry.

Leaving Paris by La Porte de Pantin, pass through the old walled fortifications surrounding the city over the National highway via Pantin and Villeparisis for a distance of thirty-one kilometers to—

CLAYE

The nearest point to Paris reached by the Germans in 1914. German patrols entered the town, but were soon driven back. Continue for a distance of fourteen kilometers to—

MEAUX

Some German patrols operating on the right flank of the main army that was pursuing the retreating French, and British, passed through the town in August, 1914. Several shells fell in the place, but did no material damage. In their retreat through the town, the British blew up the Market bridge over



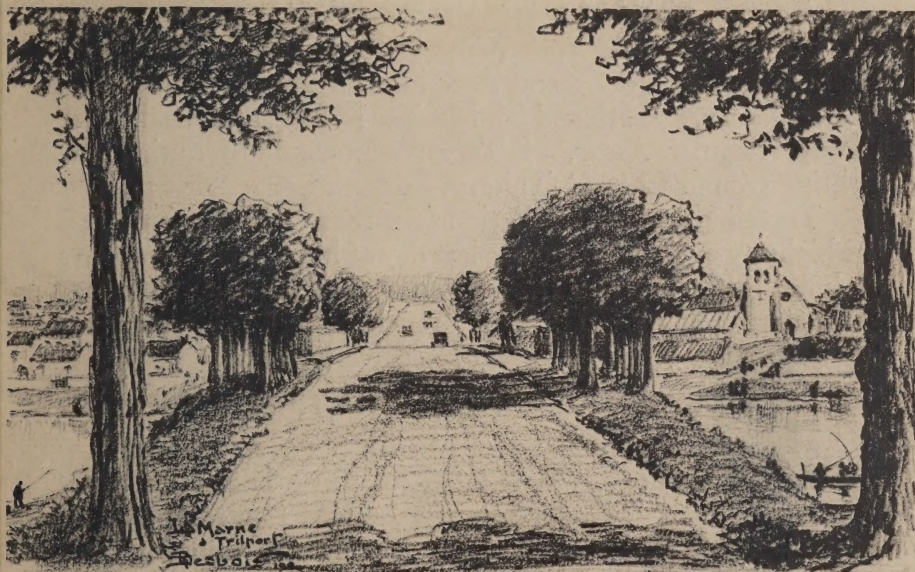
The Cathedral in Meaux.

the Marne. Passing through Meaux it will be observed that all the heads have been knocked off the statues on the side of the church. However, this was not done by the Huns, but by the populace during the French Revolution.

Five kilometers beyond Meaux is—

TRILPORT

Immediately before entering the village the traveler crosses the Marne, a name made famous by the immortal Joffre, when, in September, 1914, he drove back from its banks the advancing



Crossing the Marne at Trilport.

Hun legions. The right flank of the German army, skirting along the eastern bank of the river, passed through Trilport in its advance toward Paris. The road and the railroad bridges were destroyed by the British as they passed through the town in their retreat from Mons in August, 1914. The parts of the bridges which were later repaired by the French can be seen from the road and from the railroad.

Journeying on thirteen kilometers, the pilgrim reaches—

LA FERTÉ-sous-JOUARRE

Headquarters of the First American Corps, organized in January, 1914, were established here, entering into tactical command of American divisions for the first time in battle on July 4, 1918, thus giving additional historical significance to Independence Day.

Crossing the Marne, in the town, and proceeding north-eastward, continue for ten kilometers to—

MONTREUIL-aux-LIONS

In the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall) were established the Headquarters of the Second American Division (9th and 23rd U.S. Infantry, and 5th and 6th Marines ; Major General Omar Bundy, Regular Army, of Texas, commanding) during the fighting around Château-Thierry.

Traveling along the Paris-Metz road, the pilgrim is on the highway over which, on the last day of May and the first days of June, 1918, American troops were rushed into the battlelines of Château-Thierry to aid their French comrades in stemming the onslaughts of the enemy in his drive for Paris.

A DRAMA POIGNANT WITH TRAGEDY

Meanwhile, a drama poignant with tragedy, relieved now and then by comedy, was enacted for many kilometers along this road, as our " Doughboys " advanced toward the firing line. Weaving their way through the traffic of transport and soldiers going to the front, were war's innocent victims, the refugees, streaming to the rear, — old men and young, decrepit or crippled ; women of all ages, and little children, the flotsam and jetsam of war, forced from their homes by the rising tide of battle.

NONDESCRIPT TRANSPORT AND LOADS

In contrast to the spick-and-span business-like aspect of military transport, the means employed by the refugees to aid

them in their flight presented a bewildering and nondescript variety of vehicles drawn by jaded horses, mules and oxen, with an intermingling of carts of varying size and description, pulled by donkeys, goats and dogs. Those who lacked animal friends to aid them, tugged at the traces of wagons or pushed baby carriages and wheelbarrows along ; while others, with no means of transport save their own poor bodies, struggled wearily on afoot, burdened to the limit of their strength. Loaded down with whatever they were able to rescue, — bits of furniture, bundles of clothing and food, bottles and casks of wine, chickens, canary birds in cages, kittens and puppies, — the burdens carried by the refugees presented an innumerable variety of prized possessions, making a picture that lent a touch of the grotesque and humorous to the tragic drama of a people thrust from their homes in flight before the enemy.

THEY PLAYED THE GAME IN GOOD PART

Lest they interfere with the imperative business of rushing men, guns, ammunition and supplies to the front, the flow of refugees to the rear was frequently halted or diverted into the fields to relieve congestion and blockades in traffic on the roads and by-paths, but all of them, — old and young, — played the game of war in good part, obeying orders quickly, with sighs of resignation and tears, or with smiles and laughter.

It was an indescribable drama in which these refugees played their parts—one that the imagination, with the aid of these words, must try to visualize. With minds and hearts already filled with fear and hatred of the enemy and preyed upon by wild rumors of impending disaster at the front, fact and fiction inextricably mingled, without the links of truth and reason to connect the twain, they would cry :

“ Our poor ‘Poilus’ are falling back ! Ah, Messieurs, hundreds, nay thousands, have fallen ! And the Boches are still advancing ! We cannot stop them ! Oui, oui, it is true, Messieurs ! You can hear Mademoiselle Bertha even now bombarding Paris ! Hundreds of thousands are leaving the city and the Capital will fall ! Our country is lost ! ”

Military policemen, regulating traffic at cross-roads, aided them and sought to reassure them in their flight, but rumor, gathering speed and substance on the wings of fancy, had terrified them beyond reason and understanding.

Some among them, too old to care, burdened too long with Life's sorrows, were indifferent to these further blows from Fate. For them the end had come, or would soon come, please God !

“ C'est la guerre, Messieurs ! — and we are old. ”

THE INDOMITABLE SOUL OF FRANCE IS REFLECTED

In spite of the tragedy that weighed so heavily upon their elders, the younger people, boys and girls and young women, though they too had suffered, reflected by word and deed, the indomitable soul of France, and with cheerfulness of spirit and courage of heart, laughed at their troubles.

“ Ah, la, la ! Why so glum and fearful, mes Vieux ? Did not Papa Joffre stop the Boches once before ? Foch will do likewise, never fear. Oui, oui ! Our ‘Poilus’ may be falling back, but it is only to make a stand and stop the Germans. Soon ‘ les Américains ’ will come to help them and together they will drive the Boches from France ! ”

And thus did youth, with its hope and confidence, seek to comfort and reassure old age, and even put to shame hysterical middle age.

REFUGEES MET ADVANCING AMERICAN COLUMNS

Meanwhile, the two American divisions, split up into as many detachments as there were thoroughfares available, in order to facilitate their march to the front, were gradually approaching the battlelines, and presently encountered the first rearward columns of the refugees on all roads and by-paths. When the khaki-clad, happy-go-lucky soldiers of America, with joking and singing in their ranks, trooped suddenly into their midst, the weary wayfarers were for the moment spell-bound. It was at first difficult for these homeless wanderers to realize what it all meant, — that America, with the first of her man-

power, backed by her great resources, was going forward into battle ! Going forward to throw her sword into the Scales of War ! Finally the truth dawned upon dulled minds and carried hope to fear-stricken hearts. Yes, yes, it was true ! These stalwart youths were the Americans, going forward to help the poor " Poilus ", to stiffen wavering lines, to stop the Boches ! Ah, youth, with its hope and confidence, would conquer !

" Les Américains ! Les Américains ! "

HOPE AND COURAGE REVIVED

Rumor and fiction took flight before truth and fact. Old age plucked up hope and courage. Perhaps even they, the old, would still see victory ! Little children ceased their weeping and gazed with infantile wonder at the passing troops. With the impulsiveness of youth, young women and girls assailed the soldiers and showered flowers upon them. With gladness and laughter, and in utter disregard of impeding accoutrements of war, some of them shamelessly embraced serious young warriors, and planted warm kisses upon startled " Doughboy " faces ! Old age grasped swinging soldier hands to carry them to trembling lips in benediction ; while middle age, gaining voice once more, took up the cry :

" Vive l'Amérique ! Nos sauveurs sont arrivés ! "

(" Long live America ! Our saviors have arrived ! ")

Marking the sudden transition from settled hopelessness to quick hopefulness of which the human soul is capable, this cry gave tongue to long pent-up emotions and soon swelled to chorused salutations that greeted and followed the soldiers as they marched on roads and by-paths toward the battlelines.

Thus heartened and reassured, with a new and growing faith, before which all their fears had fled, the refugees looked at the khaki-clad columns until distance shut them out from view ; then they took up their burdens once more, trudging on to the rear, while the young soldiers of America approached closer to the firing line, — and the enemy, — to play their real part in the great drama that was so soon to be enacted.

THE TRAVELER NOW ENTERS BATTLE-AREA

Proceeding to a point seven kilometers beyond Montreuil-aux-Lions, a fork-road is reached on the left, marked by the isolated and solitary ruin of a little stone house, which once sheltered an humble family, now perhaps dead, or its members separated by the ravages of war.

Turning to the left here, the traveler soon enters the battle-area, reaching—

LUCY-le-BOCAGE

The Headquarters of the 6th Regiment of Marines were for a time located here. The supply and ammunition dumps of the regiment were also established in the village. It was along the line from Lucy to Champillon that the Marines first



LUCY-le-BOCAGE

Where the Villagers Were Wont to Worship.

met the Germans on June 2nd, 1918. By June 4th the French troops that had been holding the line in front of our men while they were getting into position, retired through our lines near Lucy.

★ Continue on the road northward towards Torcy. Before reaching this village, turn to the right. The pilgrim will now see in the distance, on the slope of the hill, just outside the sylvan battleground of Belleau Woods, what seems to be a little white camp, clustering around a tall, white pole, from which flies a flag. Approaching nearer, hundreds of crosses emerge from the field of white, — the flag is “ Old Glory ”. The pilgrim has reached —

BELLEAU CEMETERY

An outpost of America in France, where are resting in peace some twenty-three hundred American boys who were left behind when the Army returned home. Their graves are a lasting memorial of the spirit that animated the soldiers of the Great Republic across the Seas, who came thousands of miles to fight on the battlefields of France for Liberty and Justice, and in doing so followed their Country's flag “ Over the Top ” —

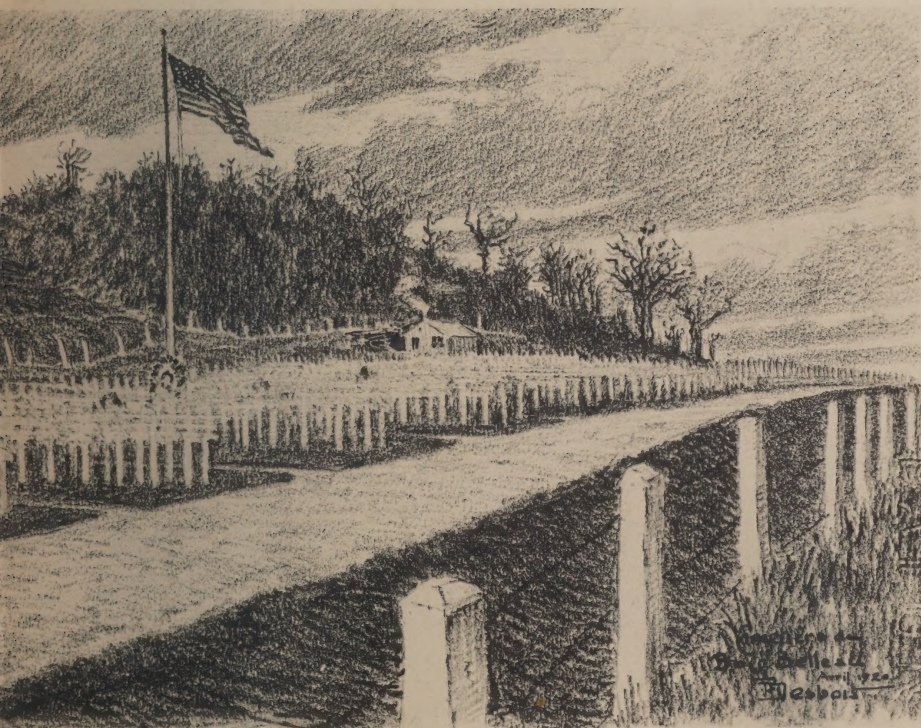
Into that realm where battle
flags are furled
And war drums throb
no longer.

At each grave kneels in spirit the mother of a boy from some State of the Union, praying for him who is still in France.

It is here that the pilgrim enters into the Inner Temple of the American Shrine of Château-Thierry, whence will forever come the Voice of our Heroic Dead.



BELLEAU
"Old Glory" Guards



CEMETERY
e Bivouac of the Dead.

BELLEAU WOODS

Directly above the cemetery lies Belleau Woods, now officially named the " Bois de la Brigade des Marines ", in honor of the achievements of the two Marine regiments forming part of the Second American Division. Thickly timbered, and of rugged, rocky formation, it was the scene of savage hand-to-hand conflicts, in which positions were taken, lost and retaken, until the woods were finally captured by the Marines. The lodge in the woods was the Forester's house before the war, and was used as a machine-gun emplacement by the Germans during the battle. Walking through the wood and following its numerous little paths beneath the shell-shattered trees, the visitor will



IN BELLEAU WOODS

Rocks from behind Which Hun Machine Gunners Mowed
Down Our Men.

discern sufficient evidences of combat to enable him to visualize the sanguinary and moving struggle waged day after day for the possession of this woodland stronghold.

Returning to the cemetery and leaving it behind, the traveler journeys on for three kilometers to —



FORESTER'S LODGE IN BELLEAU WOODS

From Which Germans Machine-gunned Americans.

BOURESCHES

Although the town was captured by the Marines on June 6, 1918, the railroad station, which had been turned into a fortress and heavily armed with machine guns, was held by the Germans until the big counter-offensive which began July 18, 1918, when it was taken by the 26th ("Yankee") American Division. (Na-



BOURESCHES
In the Wake of War.

tional Guard troops of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Maine ; Major General Clarence R. Edwards, Regular Army, of Ohio, commanding.)

Bouresches is especially interesting to the American pilgrim as an example of the destruction to which many French towns have been subjected. It is one of the villages in which, after the Second French Revolution in 1848, Liberty Trees were planted to commemorate the birth of the Second Republic. Wherever these trees prospered they were the object of great veneration by the villagers. In Bouresches the Liberty Tree planted there endured until it was shattered by the artillery of the Great War, and its gaunt specter may now be observed standing before the ruins of the village church.

From Bouresches the traveler proceeds four kilometers to --

VAUX

Little of the village remains, the terrific interchange of artillery fire between the German and American guns having practically swept the town out of existence. It had been converted into a veritable fortress by the Germans and was held in force by the enemy until July 1st, 1918, when, after a destructive artillery bombardment lasting from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., it was captured by the Infantry Brigade of the Second American Division.

Five kilometers more takes the pilgrim to—

CHATEAU-THIERRY

In this historic city the pilgrim is assured of a sincere welcome from its people who, grateful to America for the part played by our troops in the deliverance of their homes from the enemy, have expressed their appreciation in the form of a resolution of the new Municipal Council at its first session, December 10, 1918 :

“ The newly-elected Municipal Council of Château-Thierry, at the moment of sitting in the city still in ruins, addresses to the American people the testimony



VAUX

In Ruins after Capture by Americans.

of its gratitude and fraternal sympathy, and assures it that Château-Thierry will faithfully preserve the remembrance of the bravery with which the soldiers of the Great Republic fought for the victory which delivered their city.

“ A large number of those heroes were killed in that liberating battle, and now lie in this little corner of the land of France.

“ Neither their memory nor their tombs will be forgotten, and the population of Château-Thierry, itself so sorely tried, will always reserve the most pressing and cordial welcome for the American families which may come here to accomplish their



COURTEAU

Just before Entering Château-Thierry.



Church Used by Germans as Storehouse for Furniture and Other Things Taken
from Inhabitants of Château-Thierry.

pious pilgrimage : some to render the supreme homage to their loved dead, others to visit the scene on which the events of the Great War took place in 1918."

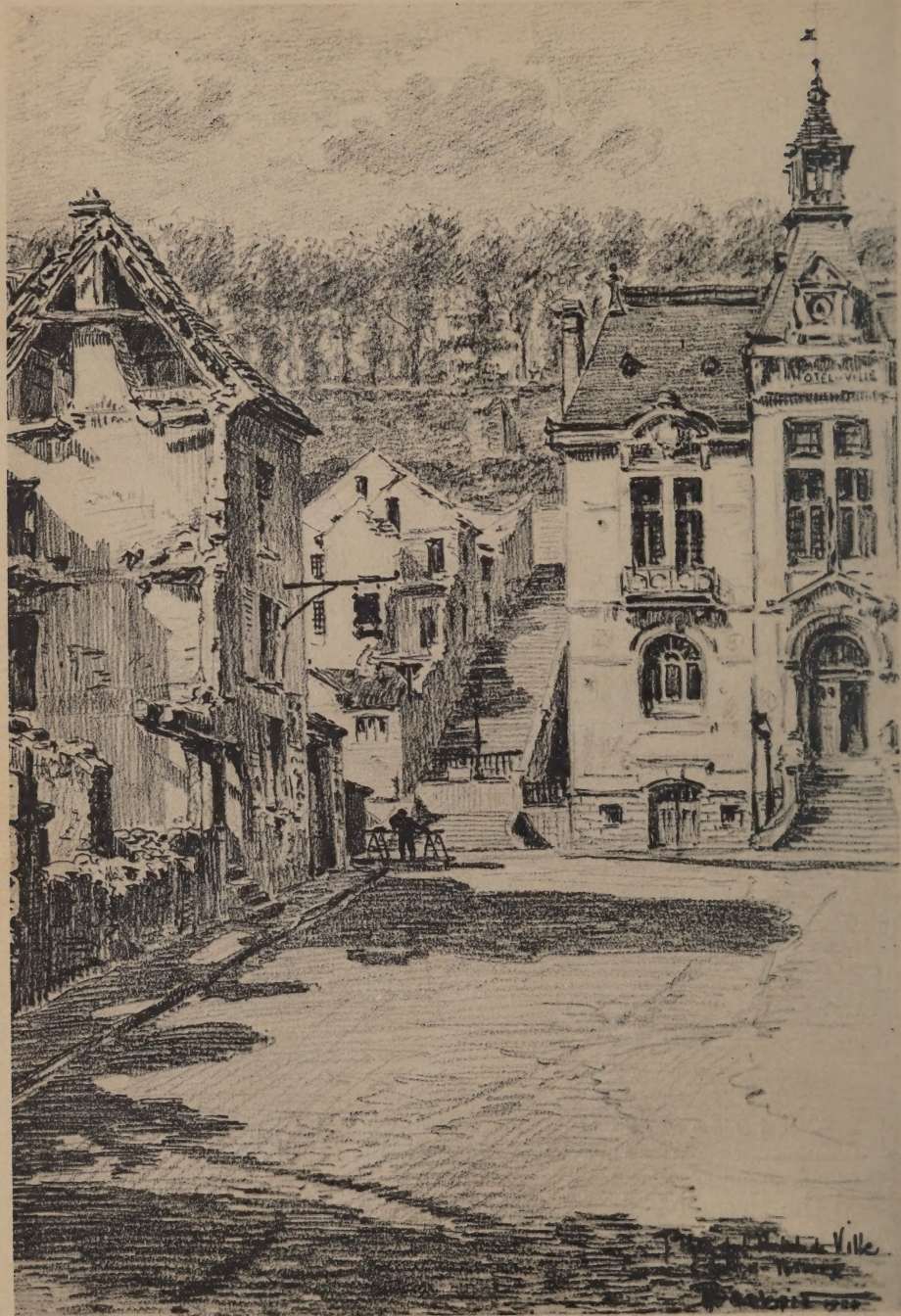
THE FIGHTING IN CHATEAU-THIERRY

While the spearpoint thrust of the great German drive for Paris in May and June, 1918, was aimed at the gateway of Château-Thierry, the only fighting that took place in the town itself was the epic little battle in which American machine gunners



Central Bridge over the Marne, Blown up with Germans on It When They Were Stopped by American Machine Gunners.

and the French Colonials held the Teuton hordes at bay. It was to the westward of the city, a few kilometers away, that the brunt of battle fell, — at Vaux, Bouresches, Lucy-le-Bocage, Belleau Woods and other points in the vicinity.



HOTEL DE VILLE (CITY HALL)
From Whose Tower Germans Poured Machine-Gun Bullets Upon the Americans
and the French Colonials.

AMERICAN MACHINE GUNS GO INTO ACTION

Divided into two sections by the river passing through it, with two bridges spanning the stream, Château-Thierry constituted the keypoint of the Marne barrier against the German advance toward Paris.

It was vital to withhold the bridges from the enemy, and thus prevent him from piercing the gateway.

Within twenty-four hours after receiving its orders the motorized 7th Machine Gun Battalion (3rd Division), — Major James G. Taylor, Regular Army, of Pennsylvania, commanding, — traveling all night, raced across one hundred and eight kilometers of French territory from the Châteauvillain training-area to Condé-en-Brie, thence on to Nesle-la-Montagne, whence, dismounting their machine guns, the two companies afoot rushed into the smoking, shell-and-battle-torn town of Château-Thierry, late in the afternoon of May 31st, to take up positions with the French Colonials, already defending the town against the enemy.

DEFENSE OF THE BRIDGES OF THE MARNE

* From the high explosives and shrapnel of German guns raking the town, spreading chaos and ruin, the young American machine gunners received their first baptism of fire. But with the coolness and determination of veterans, they quickly mounted their guns on the southern bank of the river in houses and huts, and behind garden-walls, in positions commanding a clean sweep of machine-gun fire upon the approaches to the bridges, calculated to mow down the Germans as they approached.

Meanwhile, the French Colonials, with a section of two of the American machine guns under a lieutenant (John T. F. Bissell, Regular Army, of Pennsylvania) were crossing the river to hold the northern half of the town against the enemy.

From behind the surrounding hills French batteries were reciprocating with a deluge of shells upon the advancing Germans who had reached the Marne, east of Château-Thierry, and were approaching the town along the north bank.

While the Germans, under cover of darkness, filtered into the outskirts of the northern section of the town, they made no attempt to attack the bridgeheads during the night, limiting themselves to intense shelling with high explosives and shrapnel. It was not until broad daylight (June 1st) that the enemy appeared, — two small columns, with machine guns, advancing over an open field toward the river. Immediately they were mowed down. Later in the day, under the very muzzles of our machine guns which mercifully withheld their fire, German Red Cross men were permitted unmolested to gather up their fallen comrades.



Corner of Place de l'Hôtel de Ville.



Rue Carnot which was continually Swept By Enemy Machine-Gun Fire.

TERRIFIC ENEMY BOMBARDMENT

For the remainder of the day the defenders of Chateau-Thierry were compelled to endure a terrific bombardment of artillery and machine-gun fire, under cover of which the enemy gained the hills overlooking the north bank of the river. From this vantage point German observers were able to direct a galling fire upon the south bank and into the northern half of the town, still held by the French Colonials and the two American machine guns.

It became necessary towards evening to change positions owing to the intensity of the German fire which had rendered the northern bank untenable. In order to obtain a better field



Looking down upon the Town toward the Marne, from the Chateau Heights.



Glimpse from the Chateau Grounds; Hill 204 in the Distance.

of fire, one of the American machine-gun companies moved into a wood further down stream, but the movement being detected by the enemy observers, brought down a storm of high explosives upon the wood. When the bombardment ceased, after thirty or forty shells had dropped, the machine gunners seized positions from which they could sweep the opposite bank and cover the retirement of the French troops from the northern half of the town.



Birth-place of La Fontaine.

GERMANS ATTACKED IN MASS

It was apparent that the enemy intended to follow up his bombardment during the day with an attack at night. While no enemy troops had shown themselves after the defeat of their two small columns in the morning, soon after darkness fell they were discovered stealthily advancing through the streets on the

north bank, towards the central bridge. As the French Colonials, in retiring, crossed the bridge, the enemy was close behind, — so close, indeed, that when French engineers blew up the



Leading to the Old Chateau Grounds on the Heights Above the Town.

bridge behind the retiring troops many of the assailants perished, and others who had actually succeeded in crossing were made prisoners.

ATTACK REPULSED BY AMERICAN MACHINE GUNNERS

Immediately following this spectacular incident, the Germans made a mass attack which converged from different directions upon the bridgehead. It was pitch dark, but on they came, shoulder to shoulder, chanting in guttural rhythmic tones as they advanced without realizing apparently that means of crossing the river had been snatched from them. When cut

down by the withering machine-gun fire poured into them obliquely on both flanks by the Americans across the river, they soon vanished in the darkness.

FIGHT AT THE IRON BRIDGE

Meanwhile, when the central bridge was blown up behind the French Colonials, the American detachment of machine guns, which had covered their retirement, was cut off on the northern side. With means of escape gone, through the destruction of the central bridge, the lieutenant in command of the detachment, in imminent danger of capture, fought his way along the river bank to the iron bridge up stream, only to find that the Germans were massing on the parapet above for an attack at this point. Meanwhile the machine guns of his own company across the river were pouring a leaden hail into the enemy ranks. Attempt to cross under their own fire brought down a portion of the enemy attack upon the detachment, some of whom were wounded, but at length our men attracted the attention of their comrades on the other bank, who immediately concentrated a storm of machine-gun bullets upon the bridge-head approaches, holding the Germans at bay until the detachment crossed the bridge, bringing their wounded safely with them.

Immediately thereafter the Germans, in spite of their heavy losses, renewed their attack upon the bridge, but the Americans, serving their machine guns with calm precision, swept them back time and again, until at length the enemy gave up the attempt, and here too were lost in the darkness.

THIRD ATTACK REPULSED

For the remainder of the night and during the following day (June 2), the German and French artillery exchanged fire, while the Colonials and the Hun riflemen continually sniped at each other. Lest their positions be exposed to each other, the machine guns, both those of the enemy and our own, were silent, but when darkness fell the Germans made another determined thrust for the iron bridge, only, however, to be

mowed down again by the American machine gunners. When this third attack was repulsed, the enemy let loose a storm of shells upon the defenders, keeping up the bombardment throughout the night.

FINAL DEFEAT OF THE ENEMY

Immediately after dawn (June 3) the enemy, having brought up more artillery during the night, commenced a terrific bombardment which seemed to forecast a fourth determined attack.



Porte St-Jean, of the Chateau Grounds.

While preparations to forestall the enemy were being made, a German platoon was discovered forming atop an adjacent hill, and was promptly annihilated by the machine gunners holding the iron bridge, — an incident that probably deterred further daylight efforts. Meanwhile the French artillery exchanged shell for shell with the enemy, and when night fell French en-

gineers, protected by a leaden barrage laid down on the opposite bank by the American machine gunners, placed detonating charges under the bridge. When the bridge went up with a terrific explosion, the Germans rushed from cover where they had lain concealed, but, being instantly revealed by prearranged petrol-flares set off by the engineers, they were once more mowed down by the American machine gunners.

With both bridges destroyed, the passage of the Marne barred, repulsed on every side and in every attack, the enemy was at last compelled to accept defeat, and thus was the Hun spearhead, in its last desperate thrust for the gateway of Château-Thierry, shattered by American machine gunners and their French comrades.

PILGRIMAGE COMES TO A CLOSE

Within the historic environs of this age-old city, whose romantic past was thus linked with the present by a drama in which Americans played so notable a part, comes to a close the Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Château-Thierry.

LEAVING BEHIND SCENES OF HEROIC DEEDS

Leaving behind him the scenes of the heroic deeds of his countrymen, the pilgrim begins the return trip, proceeding down the picturesque and winding valley of the historic Marne, via Essomes, Romeny, Charly, and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, from which point he continues, as he came, his journey back to Paris.





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